

# LOOKING AHEAD FOR DENTAL HEALTH

## *How to Use Fluoride Effectively to Protect Your Child's Teeth*

### **How does fluoride help my child's teeth?**

Fluoride is an important part of the crystalline structure of the tooth enamel because it makes the enamel less soluble to decay acids. The enamel can incorporate fluoride while the teeth are forming and also after they have erupted. This is why fluoride in several different forms can all be helpful.

### **How can my child get enough fluoride?**

The most natural way to receive fluoride is to drink water that has fluoride in it. This fluoride is naturally present in many water supplies because the water contacts rocks with fluoride content. Other water supplies, particularly from river sources may not contact a rich source of fluoride and therefore not have a significant fluoride concentration. If the water supply is deficient in fluoride, the alternatives are bottled fluoride water and doctor prescribed fluoride supplements.

### **What about fluoride toothpaste?**

Fluoride toothpaste is a valuable anti-cavities agent, but even the special children's formulas, contain 1.1 mg in a half-inch strip of toothpaste. This means that if a small child uses a half inch strip morning and night, he/she has the opportunity to swallow up to **eight times** the amount of fluoride that a doctor would prescribe as a supplement. Since studies show that children under 5 years old swallow a high percentage of the toothpaste that enters their mouths, we suggest no toothpaste until age 2 years, a half pea-sized amount from 2-3 years, and a pea-sized amount form 3-6 years.

Children should be taught to spit out the toothpaste, but young children swallow and then spit. Keep toothpaste out of the reach of young children; some children eat toothpaste as a treat.

### **What about fluoride rinses?**

Like fluoride toothpaste, rinses have research-proven effectiveness, but children under six should not use even the children's formulas because we cannot be sure they will not swallow the rinse.

### **Why does the dentist give fluoride treatments?**

Experienced personnel and professional equipment allow the application of a more concentrated form of fluoride than would be wise in the home setting.

### **How do I know how much fluoride is in my tap water?**

Fluoride content varies a great deal in our area, but your doctor has a reference table that allows accurate identification of the fluoride level at your home. We can also provide you with a home fluoride water analysis kit that can determine the exact fluoride level in your drinking water.

### **Which bottled water contains fluoride?**

All major suppliers have fluoridated water for home delivery. The only market-sale waters with fluoride are: Hinckley & Schimtt Nursery Water (1.0 mg/L), and Gerber Baby Water (0.5 mg/L).

# LOOKING AHEAD FOR DENTAL HEALTH

*How to Use Fluoride Effectively to Protect Your Child's Teeth*

## **Do home filters remove fluoride?**

Only Reverse Osmosis (RO) type filters remove fluoride. This type of filter contains membranes rather than cartridges. However, there are combination systems that contain cellulose and/or charcoal cartridges, which pre-filter the water before it reaches the reverse osmosis membranes. Water softeners alone do not remove fluoride, but many water softening systems are combined with reverse osmosis filters which do remove fluoride.

*This material is part of a series produced and published by*

**Santiago A. Surillo, D.D.S., M.S.**  
Pediatric Dentistry  
Orthodontics  
*Diplomate, American board of  
Orthodontics*



**Kenneth R. Whitcomb, D.D.S.**  
*Diplomate, American board of  
Pediatric Dentistry*